

Student Handout
Oakland Museum of California
What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era
Lesson Plan #2

1968: Year of Social Change and Turning Point in Vietnam and the U.S.

Oral History

Frank McAdams

Frank McAdams is a Vietnam veteran who served as a Commander in the First Marine Division. After returning from Vietnam, he worked as a journalist covering the anti-war movement in Southern California.

[Laughs] Okay. My name is Frank McAdams. I'm a professor in the USC Department of Cinema TV. I also teach screenplay structure in the UCLA extension. I'm a product of the UCLA graduate screenwriting program. And um, I was a journalist for six and a half years. And before that I was a first lieutenant in Vietnam with the First Marine Division, running truck convoys up in ... or commanding truck convoys up and down Highway One.

Interviewer: Did you um ... how ... how did you ... did you fly out of California to go to Vietnam?

Yes, I did. We had a ... I was uh, commander of a staging company at Camp Pendleton [?]. And we went through a four week training cycle. And at the end of those four weeks, they flew us out. Originally we were supposed to fly out of El Toro [?], and at the 11th hour they changed us, and put us in busses and sent us up to um, LAX, and at Los Angeles International they flew us out. And it was in the dead of night. And then from there we ... we landed in Guam. Brief fueling stop. And then from there landed in Okinawa. And had to be processed in Okinawa. They made sure that we all had a class A uniform. In case we were killed, we'd be shipped back in the casket in a class A uniform. And we had to do [?] a lot of admin processing, last will, and all that stuff, insurance and things like that. And then from there, we boarded a Continental ... I think it was a 707 for the flight quote unquote "down south." They never ... on Okinawa they never said "You're going to Vietnam." They just said you're going quote unquote "down south." And we all knew where "down south" was.

And from there we landed in Danang, and I remember getting off the plane in Danang, and there was a group of battle weary fellahs. It was something out of the film Platoon. When I walked off of the ... the uh, ramp, came down the steps, somebody ... some bright guy had a bugle, and he played the death march. [*Sings*] Bum, bum, ba, bum, bum, ba, bum, ba, bum. And then somebody else said "You're going to be sorry!" That was my initiation to Vietnam.

